

## Support For Stadium Is Growing

*Facility Would Be  
County's Largest*

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A proposal to build a sports and entertainment stadium with up to 7,000 seats, more than any other sports venue in Montgomery County, is gaining support from county and state officials and has generated discussions of possible sites in the upcounty.

A study on the feasibility of the project is about to begin, with the county's Department of Economic Development and the Maryland Stadium Authority each agreeing to contribute up to \$50,000, according to the agencies' officials. The study will address the size, number of seats, location and infrastructure needs of the proposed facility, among other issues.

The Stadium Authority began accepting preliminary proposals this month from architectural and engineering firms. The deadline for expressions of interest is tomorrow, and a preliminary draft of the study could be ready by December, said Tiara S. Robertson, assistant project manager at the Stadium Authority.

The proposed multipurpose stadium also has financial support from an array of private investors who have formed a private partnership, said Tom Doyle, lead partner of the investment group and owner of the Maryland Nighthawks professional basketball team based in Montgomery.

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# Support Growing for Stadium

Doyle said that the mission of the partnership, D&A Sports and Entertainment Group, is to create a private-public partnership that eventually would lead to the construction of a stadium with enough space to host sports tournaments, family shows, high school graduations and other events that attract audiences too large to fit into existing facilities in the county.

"Having grown up in the county, it's been apparent for years and years that there's no facility large enough to handle large sports events," said Doyle, a resident of Potomac who formed the partnership earlier this year. "I started looking into this. I formed a group . . . and we just did our own checking and due diligence and looking around into what other events could be brought to a venue like this."

The stadium proposal surfaced publicly a few months ago, when Doyle and other leaders of athletic groups formed the Sports Council of Montgomery County, a nonprofit organization. The group's mission is to explore creating more sports facilities, said Trish Heffelfinger, who is executive director of the Maryland SoccerPlex and the Maryland Soccer Foundation.

The Sports Council's leaders said that they want to achieve for sports the kind of prominence that the county's arts council accomplished in recent years, with the creation of public-private partnerships that led to new facilities for the Imagination Stage in Bethesda and BlackRock Center for the Arts in Germantown and other projects.

In May, the group requested a \$40,000 grant from the Montgomery County Council but was turned down because of competition for grants from groups with greater needs, council members said at the time.

Council member Michael Knapp

(D-Upcounty) said that he is prepared to make a case for including the stadium project in the county's budget for 2007-08. He said that examples of areas in which the county might provide funding for the proposed stadium include expanding the scope of a project at a site where "we're already doing something."

"That's why I would like to see the feasibility study in December or January, because it gives us some time to get something in the budget," he said.

Knapp stressed that the location of the proposed stadium is still in the preliminary stages of study, but that the discussion has focused on sites in northern Montgomery, which Knapp represents. Sites that have been mentioned but are not official candidates, Knapp said, include the fairgrounds in Gaithersburg, the Maryland SoccerPlex in Boyds and the Montgomery College campus in Germantown.

The county already is involved in a project that will expand the community college's presence in the life sciences, Knapp said.

"It's a place where you could say, 'This is acceptable, it's a large tract of land, we're already doing a significant development project there anyway,'" he said.

The Stadium Authority has received strong response to an advertisement about the feasibility study that appears on its Web site, Robertson said.

"We have received a lot of calls and e-mails from firms that are interested," she said. "We're not asking that it be their specialty, but we are asking that they have some type of experience building sports arenas or public arenas or convention centers."

More information about the request for expressions of interest in preparing a stadium proposal is available at the Maryland Stadium Authority's Web site, [www.mdstad.com](http://www.mdstad.com).